

Tularemia

What is tularemia?

Tularemia is a bacterial disease that infects both humans and animals. Although many wild and domestic animals have been infected, rabbits are most often involved in disease outbreaks.

Who can get tularemia?

People who spend a great deal of time outdoors are at greater risk of exposure to tularemia than people with other hobbies or jobs. Also at risk are people who come in contact with flesh or blood from infected animals, such as hunters, laboratory workers, farmers, veterinarians, trappers, meat processors, people who cook or handle wild game and household members of hunters.

How is tularemia spread?

Tularemia is not spread from person to person, but there are many other ways a person can get tularemia.

- Being bitten by an infected tick or fly.
- Your skin or mucous membranes coming in contact with contaminated water or infected blood or flesh while handling, dressing or skinning infected animals.
- Handling or eating insufficiently cooked meat of infected animals.
- Drinking contaminated water.
- Inhaling dust from contaminated dirt, grain or hay.
- Handling contaminated paws or pelts of animals.
- **Rarely**, from being bitten by a coyotes, squirrel, skunk, hog, cat or dog whose mouth was presumably contaminated by eating an infected animal.

What are the symptoms of tularemia?

The symptoms of tularemia may appear within 1 to 14 days after being exposed, but usually within 3 to 5 days. The Symptoms depend on whether the bacteria entered your body through the skin, lungs or gastrointestinal tract.

Skin—symptoms include an ulcerative skin lesion and swollen glands.

Lungs—symptoms may only include a fever or you may also have a pneumonia-like illness.

Gastrointestinal tract—Symptoms may include a throat infection, abdominal pain, diarrhea and vomiting.

What is the treatment for tularemia?

Certain antibiotics are effective in treating tularemia. Once a person has recovered, he is believed to have long-term immunity from getting the illness again. However, reinfection has been reported, particularly in laboratory workers.

How can tularemia be prevented?

- Wear rubber gloves when skinning or handling wild animals, especially rabbits.
- Cook wild game thoroughly to a recommended internal temperature.
- Avoid drinking, swimming or working in untreated water where infection may be found among wild animals.
- Avoid tick and fly bites.
- Avoid tick-infested areas, especially during the warmer months of the year.
- Wear light-colored clothing so ticks can easily be seen and removed. Wear a long-sleeved shirt, hat and long pants and tuck your pant legs into your socks.
- Walk in the center of trails to avoid overhanging grass and brush.
- Check your body every few hours for ticks when you spend a lot of time outdoors in tick-infested areas. Ticks are most often found on the thigh, arms, underarms and legs or where tight-fitting clothing has been.
- Use insect repellents containing DEET on your skin or permethrin on clothing. **Permethrin should only be used on clothing.** Be sure to follow directions on the container and wash off repellents when going back indoors. Carefully read the manufacturer's label on repellents before using on children.
- Ticks should be removed promptly and carefully by using tweezers and applying gentle, steady traction. Do not crush the tick's body when removing it. Apply the tweezers as close to the skin as possible to avoid leaving tick mouthparts in the skin. Do not remove ticks with your bare hands. Protect your hands with gloves, cloth or a tissue. Be sure to wash your hands after removing a tick.
- After removing the tick, disinfect the skin with soap and water or other available disinfectants.